

by traffic near Ibri as long ago as 1962, and there has been a report that poisoned bait is occasionally used against the Wolf *Canis lupus arabs*.

Even if recruits to the very small resident populations may be obtained from amongst the winter visitors, the pressure upon the resident birds by occasional persecution or accident means that they may now be under threat of extinction. It is hoped that the promotion of more public awareness of the beneficial habits of vultures will help alleviate this pressure.

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## Nigeria, a new wintering area for the Little Crake

### *Porzana parva*

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The Little Crake *Porzana parva* breeds in the western Palearctic, mostly in central and eastern Europe, Egypt and Algeria. The normal wintering range of those birds breeding in the western Palearctic is the Mediterranean basin, northeast and east Africa (south to the equator in Kenya and Uganda), possibly Arabia, Iraq and Iran (Cramp & Simmons 1980). Its non-breeding range in northeast Africa is the Sudan, Abyssinia and Uganda (Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1957). Moreau (1972) notes that, with the exception of Senegal, *P. parva* has not been recorded in Africa west of the Sudan, so that its absence "from the intervening area must be delusive in view of their passage through Maghreb and Libya", an opinion shared by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1970), who noted one specimen from Senegal but considered that *P. parva* "is extremely likely to occur elsewhere" in West Africa. The observations reported below fully confirm these authors'

suspicious and indicate a newly discovered wintering area over 1500 km west of the Sudan and some 2500 km east of Senegal, in Nigeria. The record is an additional species for *The Birds of Nigeria* (Elgood 1982).

From October 1981 until April 1982 a series of regular evening and morning visits, normally at 10-day intervals, were made to Jekara dam (12° 40' N, 8° 10' E), c. 30 km ENE of Kano, Nigeria. Between the reservoir and the nearby irrigated and cultivated land are fairly extensive areas of swampy ground dominated by bullrushes (*Typha*). Whilst mist-netting in these rushes, one or more small brownish unidentified crakes were seen running through the clearings made for the nets on 1, 2 and 12 December 1981. It was not until 13 December that of at least 3 individuals observed, one was conclusively identified as an adult male Little Crake and another as an adult female.

The following field notes were made at the time: "Small crake, much smaller than the Black Crake *Limnecorax flavirostra* seen beside it. Very dark brown/black on shoulders (scapulars) and centre of back; white flecks forming lines along top of shoulders and centre of back. Dark crown. Grey below with pale underchin and throat; flanks obscurely barred black and white, undertail coverts clearly barred black and white. Legs green; short bill green with red spot at base. A second individual similar to above but buffish below rather than slate grey". The green legs and red spot at the base of the bill differentiate the Little Crake from the otherwise similar Baillon's Crake *P. pusilla* and the barred undertail coverts separate it from the Spotted Crake *P. porzana*. An adult female Little Crake subsequently photographed by Roger Beecroft uncompromisingly confirm our field identification.

The crakes were not shy, but, despite their frequenting the area around our mist nets and later attempts to catch them with locally crafted leg snares, we failed to secure a specimen. They were last seen at this site on 20 December. By then the area was progressively becoming drier and though we continued to examine the area and to operate near it, we saw no more of the birds, despite the fact that we had seen them on 5 consecutive visits up to 20 December. All 15 individual Little Crakes which have occurred in Senegal were recorded between late September and November, including the single specimen obtained (Morel & Roux 1966), the latest record being 20 November 1958. Taken together, these observations suggest that Little Crakes may be itinerant winter visitors, spending only the first part of the dry season in West Africa.

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